



This volume is dedicated to:

*My wife Rogene, my companion and love  
through our half century plus of marriage*

*Our children, Scott Douglas Field and Renita Diane Uiga*

*Plus all those who follow in this clan*

*Thanks also to Joe Crnich, who organized and produced this book*

**Vernon Macdonald Field**

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*Kostner Avenue early home*

## Chapter 1 *The Growing Years*

*The  
finer the family  
the more it makes a  
person feel that he/  
she counts.*

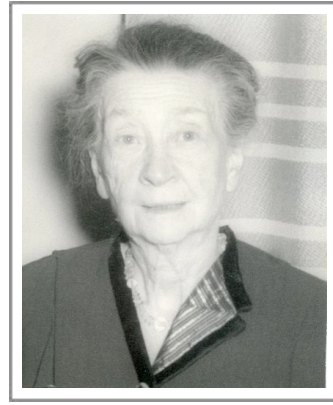
*Unknown*

**T**here I was, standing at the water's edge, looking at my 14-foot wooden sailboat at anchor. She looked grand, except that she was sunk, with the waterline half the way up the side. What had we done wrong?<sup>1</sup>

Our home was on the northwest side of Chicago, Illinois. It was designed as a two family home, upstairs/downstairs, and my bedroom was the upstairs kitchen at the back of the house. It was wonderful for a growing lad, for the pantry was stacked with old National Geographic magazines. One of the series of articles covered the "grain ship races"—the race from Australia to England, to be the first there and get the best price for the delivered grain. This was the era of the grand square riggers—those multi-mast ships with their topgallant and large mainsails. I read those articles with fascination. One summer my mother had me row her out to fish. I sat there bored, but noticed a sailboat across the lake. It was using the wind to move and that looked fascinating. I was hooked from that moment on to learn more about how to sail.

Dad (Alfred Cecil Field) was a high school physics teacher, a strict New England type. Physics wasn't the most popular subject in the world, so discipline in the classroom was difficult for him. His college classmates called him Alternating Current Field. The method of delivering electricity by alternating current was new at that time. Mom (Jessie Macdonald Field) was a high-strung, tall, talented young artist who did many beautiful

1. *If interested, turn to page six, second paragraph.*



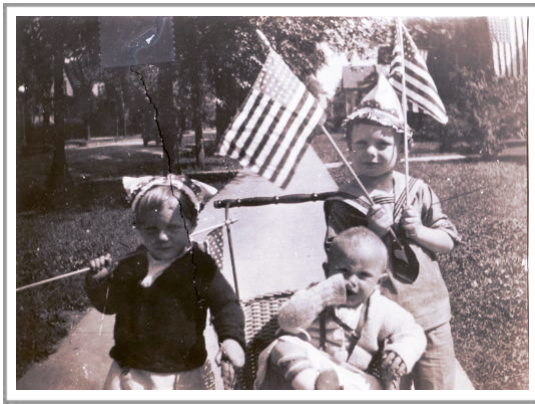
*Family Formal Gathering  
Back: Vernon, Robert, Alfred  
Front: Estelle, Jessie*

paintings in both oil and watercolor. They had met at Pratt Institute where Mom was teaching art and Dad was taking Electrical Engineering. My brother, Robert, three years older, was very interested in ham radio and to this day I remember him as "W9TQA the 'Towns' Queerest Amateur". Estelle, 18 months older, was caught up in theater and later in the Roman Catholic religion.

About the time I arrived on the scene (February 25, 1923) my maternal grandmother (Jessie Dunbar Macdonald-Gram Mac) arrived from New York City. My middle name was Macdonald, after Gram Mac. Notice that the "d" is a lower case letter. We asked Donald J Macdonald of Castleton at the Clan

Donald Center on the Isle of Skye about this spelling. He told us that my family was probably originally from the Isle of Skye, judging by the spelling of Macdonald. Gram Mac was a quiet person who became my mentor during this period.

The latter 20s was the depression era and the city of Chicago was not receiving its normal tax receipts. Teachers were then paid with Tax Warrants (a statement that the warrant would be redeemed when the city received the delinquent taxes). Not many stores would accept them as money, but the "Peoples Store" on the south side of Chicago would accept them at near face value. Once a week we would drive across town to buy food. A dollar went a long way then so we ended up with a little



*Estelle,  
Vernon,  
Robert*

disposable income. The family was thus able to purchase some furniture and rugs during that period.

Our home had a two-car garage in the backyard. It was the era of one-car families, so we rented out the extra stall in the garage. The person using it did much of his own car maintenance in the backyard. I have no idea why, but I was fascinated with the process and sat for hours watching him work.



*Estelle, Robert, Vernon*

One of my earliest recollections was riding in the back seat of our car with my siblings, going north from our cottage in Lake Como. We were going to look at a possible building site in northern Wisconsin. The conclusion of our trip was to not purchase property that far from our Chicago home. Instead, we continued living a number of summers at Lake Como. Later the family had another cottage built on the north side of Lake Geneva in the Knollwood subdivision. It was there that I spent many summers while growing up. Dad did a lot of resting up during the summer months as the school year was very tiring and frustrating for him. Dad enjoyed home-made root beer which announced its readiness for drinking by the popping of the bottle corks. Another remembrance from that era was the long, long trips from Chicago to Lake Como (about sixty miles). We knew when we



*Traveling with Tent  
Estelle standing, Vernon  
seated*

*Lake Como Cottage  
Note native Indian  
marker tree on left  
(bent to indicate  
direction to lake)*



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were getting close, as there was a Borden milk processing plant less than fifteen minutes from our cottage. "Hurray, we'll be there shortly!"

In second or third grade I was skipped a grade, so I was always one of the younger of my classmates thereafter. In sixth grade our English teacher told the class that we were dumb in grammar. I didn't think we were so dumb in that subject, so I remembered that comment.

I felt very limited in my ability to get around and badly wanted a bicycle for my transportation. The fall when I was about eleven the local rent-a-bike place was selling most of their bikes at very desirable prices. With my savings and some parental financial help, my dream of transportation was fulfilled. This bicycle served my needs for many years, including being transportation to my first job as a bicycle repair person at a bicycle shop on the south side, many miles from home. I was in seventh or eighth grade at the time and was hired at 10 cents an hour. At the end of a 10-hour day, my wages of \$1.00 was placed in my hand. I looked at that dollar and said to myself, "That is the hardest earned dollar I will ever see". It was! I didn't return to that shop again.



*Estelle, Robert, Vernon*

Our family was very musical. Because Gram Mac had been a concert pianist, there was a baby grand piano in the front room downstairs where she regularly practiced. One of her favorite composers was Chopin, so many of his concertos and nocturnes became familiar melodies. She also was very religious, reading her Bible regularly. This must have rubbed off on me, for at an early age I started attending the Methodist church (closest to home) and later the Presbyterian Church. Robert became a flutist. Estelle enjoyed the cello. When my turn came, I liked the flute so

that was my instrument, along with the piccolo. I enjoyably played in the high school orchestra and college marching band.

In the latter thirties our family needed another car. They were seriously looking at a used Buick or Oldsmobile (Olds). At that time General Motors (GM) was using the Olds to introduce new features and it was equipped with hydraulic brakes. The Buick had mechanical brakes. I recommended the Olds with the better brakes, but they chose to buy the Buick. The Buick was a very durable car that was in the family for many years but they always had trouble with those poor mechanical brakes.

My interest in girls developed slowly but in about 8<sup>th</sup> grade I had a crush on one of my classmates, Florence Kroon. I took her to the graduation dance where she wore a purple gown. One of the popular tunes at that time was Deep Purple and I still remember that melody. Another melody that impressed me occurred when I was shopping at the local Sears. On the PA system they started playing "Oh Johnny", sung by Bonny Baker in her wee voice. I stopped to listen and looked around me at the multitude of men who had also paused to listen to her seductive voice.

There always seem to be bullies in any era and I met one on my way home for lunch one day. He started hitting me and I knew time was short to have lunch and return to school. I took a few blows, covered my face and just started bawling to get rid of him. The next time he confronted me was after school. This time I put up my fists and we went at it. After a few blows by both of us, including my punch on his nose, he decided I wasn't such a pushover and he thereafter left me alone.

My high school years were filled with college preparation subjects that included most of the math that was available. During my freshman high school year some friends of Robert said they would help me build a sail boat. We found a plan for a 14-foot flat-bottom centerboard boat from a glue manufacturer and they helped me build it. I learned much about sailing while I had "Spray".

When summer friends, who also lived in our subdivision on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, said their family was going to launch a sailboat a couple of miles away, I was interested. I became very interested when they said that none of those aboard had sailed before. I started walking on the lakefront in their direction to see if I could help. I rounded a point where I could see their efforts to get the boat underway. There was an on-shore breeze; they would push the boat into deep water but then would drift back into shallow water to start the cycle over again. When this small youth arrived, I introduced myself and asked if I could help. I was welcomed aboard this beautiful, round bottom 18 foot Arrowhead sloop. Being the only sailor aboard, I took the tiller. After instructions about how to tack<sup>2</sup> the boat, a person held the boat in deep water and we got under way. They quickly learned the technique and were all tacking before we left the bay.

Meanwhile, the incident that opened this narrative came to mind. We talked about the problem while under way and they suggested the reason for the boat sinking. My earlier boat-building companions knew little about the response of various types of wood to water. The twelve inch yellow-pine bottom planks absorbed too much water and buckled outward causing the leak. My new-found friends recommended that the planks be replaced with 4-in. white-pine. They helped me replace the bottom planks with the narrower planks and the change made the boat useable for many years.

In the sophomore high school year I began to wonder what would be my specialty in college. My request to my parents was, "I think I am most interested in Mechanical Engineering, but is there some course that would help me define my career path?" They responded, saying that if I enjoyed

*2. To tack is to sail about forty-five degrees to the wind, first with the wind over the left bow, then with wind over the right bow. This enables you to make progress directly into the wind.*



*Ralph Crossman (Pop)  
Gardening was his  
avocation—shown in  
his Long Island  
greenhouse*

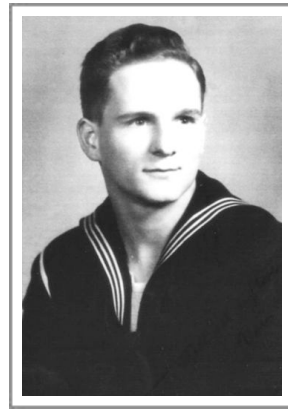
Automotive Shop my interests were mostly mechanical. My instructor was Mr. Anderson who enjoyed giving a challenge to students and then turning them loose. His typical approach was, "That engine won't start, so figure it out!" It was usually a timing, ignition or carburetor problem that needed to be solved. His way of encouragement was, "If it has a

correct air/fuel mixture and the spark occurs at the correct time, the damned thing has to work!" Our 1941 Chevrolet needed this kind of logic a number of times to keep it running, but the cars made after the year 2000 are so reliable that little trouble-shooting is needed. This enjoyable class led me to my lifelong avocation: interest in the maintenance and enjoyment of automobiles. It also helped me decide on my vocation in mechanical engineering.

My junior high school year started in fall, 1938. Robert had joined the Navy during the previous year and came home on leave. He commented that there were rumblings of war in Europe and expected the US would be drawn into this conflict eventually. How true!

In my high school senior year, fall 1939, I took many advanced classes and enjoyed the summer sailing at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. My sailing time was able to include both Spray and the Arrowhead sloop.

In September, 1940 I headed toward the University of Illinois (UI) at Champaign/Urbana, Illinois. Being my first time away from home, I shortly became very homesick. My mentor became Pop Crossman, a long-time friend of the family who was a professor teaching drafting at UI. He was a great gardener and during the fall I helped him with his planting of tulip bulbs in the yard around the campus Presbyterian Church. The



homesickness continued until I headed home for the Thanksgiving break. Passing through corn fields and rural areas was very pleasurable. The southern outskirts of Chicago, with multi-story tenement houses on both sides of the tracks along with littered yards with junk and clothing to dry made me depressed! Looking at this scene I concluded that I never wanted to return to Chicago. Thus ended my homesickness!

I didn't take trigonometry in high school, so it became one of my freshman courses. I memorized the sine, tangent, etc. but it made no sense to me. In desperation I went to an upperclassman and asked, "What does it mean?" With the simple statement, "The numbers in trig tables are just the ratio of the lengths of the sides of a right triangle", the light went ON and the semester concluded easily. With paper route savings, room paid by my parents and meal job at the faculty club (made possible by Pop) my school costs were covered but exhausted. Thus, a summer job was needed. I had few skills so ended up with a job at the Carnegie-Illinois steel mill on the south side of Chicago. I was the oiler on the huge engine that fed the air to the blast furnace. The pay scale was much improved over my bicycle shop job. The hour commute each way by street car and elevated train was tedious, so I concluded that a job change was needed. Then, a job was found at less pay (but acceptable) nearer home which made life much more livable.

The sophomore year started normally. To support the fees and tuition costs, my work load was: room job as facility repair person at the campus Presbyterian Church Student Center; meal job at the faculty club; and serving drinks at a local pub to provide me with pocket money. Sunday December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Pearl Harbor Day, changed the world and forced me to re-evaluate my options for continuing my education. I wanted to be in the Navy and they fortunately had the V-12 program that allowed me to continue my studies and removed me from the draft pool. Studies continued after signing up for that program.